



EEOC News

U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
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FOREST PRODUCTS COMPANY TO PAY \$15,000 FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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EEOC Suit Said Bennett Forest Products Subjected Female Worker To Abuse Including False Rumors and Offensive Graffiti

SEATTLE – The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced today that it has settled its sexual harassment and constructive discharge lawsuit against a northern Idaho lumber mill for \$15,000 and the company's agreement to take steps to prevent future discriminatory conduct.

The EEOC achieved the settlement on behalf of a former female employee who worked at Bennett Forest's lumber mill. EEOC's suit (Civil Action No. 04-401-N-EJL), filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho, alleged she was sexually harassed through offensive graffiti written about her on boards and the walls of the men's restroom. Although the female employee complained immediately to supervisors about the offensive graffiti, Bennett Forest failed to discipline anyone for the harassment. As a result, the EEOC said, she was forced to quit.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment or pregnancy) or national origin and protects employees who complain about such offenses from retaliation. Bennett Forest has denied the allegations.

Under the EEOC's settlement, besides the monetary payment, Bennett Forest agreed to a two-year consent decree with broad injunctive relief including a policy that imposes substantial discipline upon any supervisor or manager who engages in discrimination, sexually harasses any employee or who retaliates against anyone for complaining or taking part in a harassment investigation.

Bennett Forest also agreed to designate a knowledgeable and experienced EEO coordinator and to revise its employee appraisal process to include "commitment to equal employment

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opportunity” as a criterion for qualification and performance evaluation for supervisors and managers. Further, the company will provide annual training to all managers and employees on employment discrimination and periodic compliance reports that will include any complaints of sexual harassment and retaliation.

"Employers must not only issue sexual harassment policies but they must also ensure that they're enforced through periodic training. This way they'll both educate workers on their rights to be free from discrimination and deter would-be harassers," said EEOC Regional Attorney A. Luis Lucero, Jr.

EEOC Seattle District Director Jeanette Leino said, "We will vigorously fight discrimination wherever it occurs and however it manifests itself. We are pleased that the company has agreed to resolve this lawsuit through far-reaching corrective measures. This settlement should inform all employers in the Pacific Northwest that engaging in harassment is not an acceptable cost of doing business."

Bennett Forest is a private company partly owned by John Bennett that includes several facilities located primarily in northern Idaho. The company employs more than 100 employees throughout its territory.

In addition to enforcing Title VII, the EEOC enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), which protects workers age 40 and older from discrimination based on age; the Equal Pay Act, which prohibits gender-based wage discrimination; the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the federal sector; Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments; and sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Further information about the Commission is available on the agency's web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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